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LEARN

Crocker Farm Visioning Group

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Background: Crocker Farm Visioning Project

The process for the Amherst Elementary Schools Building Project (formerly the Wildwood Building Project) started in November, 2013 when a Statement of Interest was accepted by the Massachusetts School Building Authority for the Wildwood School.

Between November, 2013 and May, 2016 a series of meetings and processes helped to shape the plan that is now in place: a new building will be built on the site of the current Wildwood School, and it will house two co-located schools within it. Each school would house about 375 students in grades 2-6. Crocker Farm School will be converted into an early childhood center for Preschool through First Grade students across the town. It currently houses 422 students and 42.3 teachers serving a prek-6 population.

Construction will begin in the fall of 2017; Wildwood students will remain in school during the first phase. The K-6 population of Wildwood will transition into the completed section of the new school in the 2019-2020 school year. The building will be completed in 2020-2021 when the consolidation would take place.

Crocker Farm School was renovated in 2002 and was designated an award-winning building.

In the past 8 years, there has been a significant issue with overcrowding due to increasing student population. Due to overcrowding, spaces have been repurposed (for example, the community room is now an instructional space, and some instructional spaces are being shared (ELL, SE, Title I services, etc.)

The reconfiguration of the physical plant will free up classroom spaces to add preschool sections so that additional Amherst children can receive a high-quality, early childhood learning experience.

The Visioning Process:

Amherst Public Schools convened a Crocker Farm Early Childhood Visioning Group to explore Crocker Farm becoming a PreK-1st grade school and help prepare for the new changes and opportunities. The group met four times, with the second meeting taking place at the Goodwin College Early Childhood Magnet School, where the team toured the state of the art facility and met with a panel of staff from the school for a question and answer session. All meeting agendas can be found in the appendix.

The visioning work group (see membership in appendix) utilized the “Framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating prek-3rd grade approaches (Kauerz and Coffman, 2013) to generate and test ideas about their vision for Crocker Farm School in the future. This framework was produced after an extensive review of multiple bodies of literature that describe the essential elements of teaching and learning that produce positive changes in children’s outcomes, birth through grade 8. It was pilot tested in over 35 school districts and communities across the U.S. and was peer reviewed by leading academic scholars and practitioner-experts. The visioning work group customized the framework so that the final iteration, represented herein, contains terminology and language that reflects teaching and learning in Amherst, Massachusetts. The final column serves as an implementation checklist to keep the vision viable and obtainable by identifying concrete actions and resources needed.

The Group Vision

- Crocker Farm is a nurturing, caring school community where students are excited about learning, engaged and empowered.
- Exploration and authentic learning are valued
- Educators use a balanced and flexible approach that includes direct instruction
- School provides equitable education for all students by embracing diverse backgrounds and meeting students where they are
- Families are appreciated and are an integrated part of the learning process
- Collaboration is a guiding value

Effective Classroom Strategies



Administrators (district superintendents, school principals, early childhood directors) actively create a culture and organizational structures that ensure the quality of PreK-3rd grade learning.

PreK-3rd Strategies	Example Implementation Indicators	Actions	Actions	Who -What is Needed
There is a system for meeting the needs of all students	Students with IEP’s or in the RTI process have individualized goals; children in child study team process, children on a 504 plan, some students have teachers who develop goals with them specifically; Check in Check out plan has goals for students involved with that program.	Thoroughly develop grade level expectations and assessments to guide goal setting and differentiation for individual students	Articulate strategies for meeting the needs of students who exceed grade level benchmarks How do we reflect on our curriculum in a way that ensures that it provides enrichment for all Explore project-based approach as a tool for cross classroom and cross grade level differentiation .	Develop a menu of assessment that are developmentally appropriate for young children PreK-1 and can be used to inform instruction Generate a statement about how we view children
The environment is collaborative		Identify roles and responsibilities for co-educators Create opportunities for students to play/problem-solve, work together	Identify ways to get resources for play and exploration	Add this to resource mapping of support staff Provide opportunities for adults – staff and parents – to learn more about what play is and how to make it happen
There are clear learning objectives yet room for flexibility	In 2016/17 all exploring and trying out using learning targets (Ron Berger work)			Review results from using learning targets and evaluate how it’s going
The environment is language rich		Be strategic about developing oral language, be intentional		Committee work around methodology Ideas built into curriculum; shared resource book of ideas developed; PD about strategies for this; explore video-modeling Use video as a stimulus for students – get the technology Explore ways to differentiate for students with limited language – also ELL
Children feel safe, excited about learning, valued and heard	Have anti-bullying curriculum (Second Step)	Consider the ways skills develop in children by scaffolding and and providing access	Utilize expectations checklist for classrooms (being developed now)	Roll out Second Step or other developmentally appropriate anti-bullying curriculum Develop expectations checklist for Crocker Farm – identify team to work on this

Teachers and Teaching



Teachers are actively dedicated to providing high-quality instruction and effective learning experiences for all children, PreK-3rd grade.

PreK-3rd Strategies	Example Implementation Indicators	Actions	Actions	Who -What is Needed
There is collaboration between grades	Time is allocated 1x month Grade level meetings 3x year vertical teams	Share out more at staff meetings	Consider brain research – cognitive, character, and resiliency Research based to support transitions between grades	Professional development is fully centered around young students and occurs regularly in staff meetings Preschool staff are connected to the Kindergarten and grade 1 colleagues in ways that are not possible in current model
		Visit STEAM at Framingham	Rethink release days Need vertical team planning time	
Transitions are seamless		Design strategic continuity for students within the building		
Class sizes are small	Pre-K: 12-15 students K: 16-18 students 1: 18-20 students			
There is ample time to plan		Need more collaboration among certified staff and between certified and non-certified	Adjust schedule for half days	
There is a team of specialists including counselors		Need all service s for all grades		
There is a true special ed. integration	ELL, math, reading, pysch., sw, guidance, OT's, PT's, Behavior Specialists, SLP's	Need consistent PBIS - visible in the school Second step Word walls - Andover	Need cross grade flexibility	
There are visual models		Need to follow up and check in time		
There is ample PD		PD for all staff positions - certified, non-certified, support staff	Explore World Language Options Chinese , Spanish Narrowing of priorities	
The approach is strength based, using technology and visual models		Alphabet charts, name cards, common vocabulary to enhance school wide language learning	Technology: Smart Boards, Ipads, document camera 2 teaching stations Identify curriculum materials to be allocated to staff	

Family Engagement Strategies



Standards, curricula, and assessments focus on both academic and social-emotional skills, and are aligned to create instructional coherence, PreK-3rd grade.

PreK-3rd Strategies	Example Implementation Indicators	Actions	Actions	Who -What is Needed
Parents are involved	We have a family center	Audit current practices	Add registration at Crocker Farm and in the community	Shift district resources
		Conduct survey of what parents think, need, want		
		Add a satellite of the family center to Crocker Farm		
		Every kid gets a tour		
Transitions are seamless into pre-k and out of Crocker Farm		Send home newsletters from each classroom twice a month and from the whole school once a month	Define the orientation process	
		Connect the registration process to the induction process	Negotiate the content – some regular content, some not	
		Explore the idea of home visits but can’t commit to it Outreach workers???	Kindergarten families who didn’t have a visit will get one	
		Make a way for children in community prek to visit before kindergarten	Strengthen home-school connection – maybe a community reach out by neighborhood	
There are gatherings	"Dinner is on us" is successful	Hold potlucks	Dinner on us-connect with that	
There are gatherings	Open house happens	Re-visit open house-what are the goals/desired outcomes?		
		Expand screenings – what happens at that time		
There is a dedicated space for families to meet and learn				
There are activities such as playgroups scheduled		Connect with the Hitchcock Center		
There are visual models There is free transportation Parking is ample and easy There is 0-3 outreach				

Learning Environment



The physical space and emotional environment (campuses, buildings, schools, and classrooms) promote collaborative relationships, actively engage all children in a variety of learning experiences and settings, and support the health and wellness of children and adults.

PreK-3rd Strategies	Example Implementation Indicators	Actions	Actions	Who -What is Needed
There are big spaces		Beyond shared space - magnetic balls and ramps Enclose the courtyard		
		Maker Space		
There are small spaces		Low stimulation nook		
There are outdoor spaces		Large back playground should be enclosed as per regulations and currently not ADA accessible	Open beds with dirt for free exploration Define ways to use nature trail and bring in resources from the community to maintain / collaborate	
NOT a traditional elementary school		Gear for all weather - boots, snow pants, etc...		
Staff lounge has relaxing furniture		Remove cubbies - hallway storage, Mike to explore		
Cafeteria has themes		Define		
Hot water faucets				
Feels homey		Create an inviting environment		
Nature trail with resourced gear		Shift of learning environment - 2 parallel instructional spaces - sound issues		
Bright - lots of natural light				
Doors				
Storage		Children have access to storage		
Colorful				
Individual spaces		SENSORY ROOM NOT NEGOTIABLE		
Texture - rails, walls				
Hallways have display space for children's work		Interactive hallway spaces		

Instructional Tools



Current, relevant, and high-quality data from multiple sources are used to improve schools, programs, classrooms, instruction, professional development, and other systems.

PreK-3rd Strategies	Example Implementation Indicators	Actions	Actions	Who -What is Needed
Child-centered curriculum designed specifically around the academic and social needs of young children		Teach explicit skills in a systematic, direct manner Emergent topics Books Monetary resourcing for supplies One unit per grade level-reading, writing, math	Explore creating a balance of skills building and projects inquiry Materials to support units	Consider having some teachers pilot a project inquiry - based approach and share it Partner with Jen Reese (Science Coordinator) for all grades
Oral language is a priority		Target vocabulary - communicate to families Dolch site word lists?		
There is choice in scheduling		Explore and Define		
Wonder and curiosity are encouraged		Prek-1 Continuum		
The environment is multilingual and multicultural There are peer interactions galore		Multi-modal - movement gross motor integrated		Define, explore specific strategies and build capacity to integrate
There is poetry, drama, song The work is hands on		Math curriculum to follow		
There is use of media				
There are field trips in and out				
There is social engagement				

Strategic Administrator Effectiveness



Families are actively and systemically involved with PreK-3rd teachers and administrators as full partners in helping their children develop, learn, and achieve.

PreK-3rd Strategies	Example Implementation Indicators	Actions		Who -What is Needed
Administrators foster respectful partnerships		Specialist teachers should become better integrated; Consider a pedagogista role		Explore what support/staffing looks like at each grade level
		Ensure there is added support in the classrooms Right now there is an average 19 students with a low range between classrooms		
Registration	Centralized	Registration would shift from the Central Office to being done at Crocker Farm's office, to be combined with a welcoming packet and tour; requires bilingual clerical staff member		Identify where it will take place, ensure consistency in the process (articulate the procedures) who will do this
		Placement occurs at the school by school staff		Identify steps and people responsible for decisions
Central Administration <i>Equation Here</i> supports the need of autonomy in designing school staffing structures	The staffing will be: guidance counselor, psychologist, behaviorist analyst (bcba), school adjustment counselor, principal, assistant principal	The Principal and Asst. Principal need to have extensive early childhood experience and and expertise		Articulate roles and responsibilities for leadership team, support staff
	Central and school administrators support the need for support around the implementation of new initiatives tailored to ECE	Ideas for new initiatives should flow back and forth from the school to central office	Central office needs to be involved in supporting inter - school curriculum alignment discussions	Design a calendar of activities – name how often, agendas, etc.
			Opportunities for second grade teachers and other staff from	
			Teachers need to get together during the year to discuss curriculum alignment between schools	
Transitions: prek - k		Hold transition activities	Build in teacher to teacher conversation time for prek-k	
Transition to K (community children too)				
Grade one - grade two		There is a robust district transition model (grade 6-7) – take a look at that – what ideas and practices can we import	Build in teacher to teacher conversation time for k-1 and 1-2 transitions	Second grade student ambassadors
	Exiting first graders in each cluster are grouped	Peer ambassadors: k-4, 1-5, 2-6, prek-3	Have some vertical grade level team meetings	

Continuity and Pathways



Every child, especially those most at risk for school failure, has access to a continuity of services and a clear pathway of high-quality education from PreK through 3rd grade.

PreK-3rd Strategies	Example Implementation Indicators	Actions	Actions	Who -What is Needed
There is a partnership with museums	Museums Ten is being utilized	Have more field trips brought In versus young students traveling out	Have someone in the school coordinate the use of resources – maybe a specialist teacher in that role	Map talent for this in staff resource allocation process
There are field Trips in and out				
There are connections to higher ed	We have interns	Explore possibility of relationships with higher ed ECE opportunities		Have a conversation with HR Clarify a process for these types of potential collaborations
CES collaborative	There is a membership	Become a host site for ECE		Identify a person at Crocker Farm to communicate what we want to do with CES to Mike
	Mike is the liasion	PD Work with them around ECE programming and integrating it with district needs		

Crocker Farm Visioning Workgroup

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